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AUTHOR Maynard, Marianne
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ABSTRACT

This paper addresses the development of three graduate courses which integrate international and global aspects in the course content. The University Center for International Rehabilitation at Michigan State University is described along with its goals and objectives. The purpose and content of the three courses are summarized, including: (1) the introductory course for foreign students; (2) international aspects of rehabilitation/special education; and (3) the international aspects-overseas course. The paper also notes the additional focus of the formal education program to develop leadership personnel within the rehabilitation/special education field. (JAC)

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# An International Perspective to a Rehabilitation Special Education Graduate Program

Marianne Maynard
Associate Professor and
Senior Research Associate
University Center for International Rehabilitation
Michigan State University
East Lansing, Michigan

CG 016274

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An International Perspective in a
Rehabilitation/Special Education Graduate Program

"The vast majority of today's college and university students do not know enough about international affairs to live and work actively in a world where countries are increasingly interdependent." (The Chronicle of Higher Education, April 20, 1981.)

We are confronted daily with global issues that affect our lives. It would seem that the majority of college students are not prepared academically to understand or profit professionally from international information. The need to broaden curricula to include international content becomes imperative if students are to live and work successfully in a world society.

Berendzen, president of American University, stated in an interview with an editor of U.S. News and World Report (1981) that,

> There is an evolutionary trend under way in American higher education that will produce increasing numbers of foreign students in U.S. colleges and universities. Student bodies will broaden in nationality, just as they have broadened in race, sex and age.
>
> By 1990, probably more than 10 percent of college students in the U.S. will come from abroad. Many of the students will be concentrated in certain disciplines, such as engineering, accounting, business management and computer science, so that by the end of the century 40 to 50 percent of students in the U.S. in some high-technology subjects will be from foreign lands...

An increasing number of these foreign students from developing countries are also electing to pursue coursework in the field of education and rehabilitation related subjects because of the need to increase the quality of education and improve services for special population groups in their countries. With an estimate of more than five hundred million disabled people in the world today (Rehabilitation International, 1981), the need for trained personnel to serve this special population is urgent.

This paper addresses the development of three graduate courses which

integrate international and global aspects in the course content. The courses were designed especially for students pursuing advanced degrees in special education and rehabilitation related curricula. The impetus for the development of these courses came from the faculty of the University Center for International Rehabilitation (UCIR).

The Nature of UCIR

The University Center for International Rehabilitation (UCIR), funded by the National Institute of Handicapped Research, Department of Education, is located on the campus of Michigan State University. It is locally administered through the joint efforts of the College of Education, College of Osteopathic Medicine, and Office of International Studies and Programs. The center operates with seven faculty and staff members, and about 18 graduate research assistants who are pursuing advanced degrees in such fields as rehabilitation counseling, special education, therapeutic recreation and related disciplines. Two-thirds of these graduate assistants are foreign nationals who will return to administrative, professional practice and academic positions in their home countries. The goals of the center are to engage in international exchange of information, enhance the international awareness of U.S. universities engaged in rehabilitation research and training, and educate foreign students in rehabilitation-related disciplines.

The education/training activities are part of the ongoing dissemination of the UCIR project and focus on the development and support of degree-granting education, short-term training (non-degree) programs, technical assistance, and consultation. The degree programs are designed for individuals with previous training or experience in areas related to rehabilitation and/or special education. Such academic programs prepare individuals to assume leadership positions in such areas as administration, research, and college teaching in

rehabilitation, special education, recreation, health, and other rehabilitation-related fields.

Purpose of Courses

In 1979, faculty members with the University Center for International Rehabilitation, the rehabilitation counseling education program, and special education at Michigan State University explored the possibility of developing several core courses in international rehabilitation/special education. The assumptions underlying the development of these courses were based on the following: a need to equip students to cope with the increasing number of global issues that impact on all professional fields; the university's interest, involvement and long history in international activities and reputation for leadership in international education; the recommendation from an all-university international task force that every profession and discipline should take international education into consideration when designing courses and curricula; and the encouragement from the National Institute of Handicapped Research for such a core emphasis.

A formal proposal for two new courses was submitted through the appropriate university committees and received approval. The first course, "Introduction to (International) Special Education/Rehabilitation-U.S.A.," was specifically designed for foreign students enrolled in the special education and rehabilitation counseling curriculum. The three-credit course offered in the fall term is conducted as a small seminar class and provides foreign students with a frame of reference for understanding and comparing the development and status of rehabilitation/special education in the U.S. to that of their own countries. It also provides U.S. students with a means of reexamining basic philosophies, attitudes, and issues in the field of rehabilitation. The second course, "International Aspects of Rehabilitation/Special Education,"

offered in the spring term, enhances understanding of the international arena by examining in some detail the philosophy, policies, delivery systems, and issues in rehabilitation/special education in selected countries.

A three-week summer overseas course, along with an independent study, provides a concentrated in-depth study of rehabilitation/special education in specific countries. The 1981 overseas course provided lectures, site visits to special education and rehabilitation facilities in the Heidelberg area in the Federal Republic of Germany; Mulhouse, France; and Basel, Switzerland. A yearly summer overseas course on "Rehabilitation/Special Education" will be offered each year in different countries in order to expose students to a variety of experiences, resources and information.

Each of the courses can be taken alone or in sequence. The instructors make every effort to gear the learning experiences to students' personal and professional backgrounds, as well as their geographic and cultural orientations. A profile of each student is obtained during the first day of class, which provides the basis for relating course content to the learning needs of students. Since each of the courses is planned to enhance the sharing of international experiences, the students' profiles become a valuable tool for identifying those with international experience and knowledge who can contribute to class discussion.

The course objectives serve to structure content and learning experiences, and are geared toward enabling the student to develop skills in inductive, deductive and logical thinking, along with the acquisition of new knowledge and resources. By examining together the spectrum of special education/ rehabilitation, students gain a better perspective of the continuity of services. Each of the new courses will be briefly described.

The Introductory Course for Foreign Students

The course was especially designed for new foreign students at the university. The course objectives reflects the need of foreign students enrolled in the rehabilitation counseling and special education curriculum to understand the U.S. special education/rehabilitation resource system and learn how to identify and retrieve national and international information/resources related to rehabilitation and special education. The class averages ten to twelve students, including several U.S. students. The small size enhances sharing among students and faculty who participate as resource and information facilitators. Types of information resources are discussed along with practice in identifying information and appropriate retrieval methods.

Arrangements are made for students to visit facilities and agencies serving such populations as physically, emotionally, and mentally handicapped children or adults to obtain on-site information. Students are participant-observers on these visits, interviewing staff and clients, observing, and participating with clients in the activity when possible. Verbal and written reports of information gained from these visits are presented in class. For several of the foreign students, this is their first exposure to a U.S. agency program. The assignment enables students to better understand the difference between retrieving information first hand as opposed to the print or other use of resources to obtain information.

Students are provided many resources about where to obtain information on specific areas and are required to use the university and state reference library along with some of the other information technologies. They are encouraged to begin building their own resource file with contents relevant to their areas of interest and learning goals.

International Aspects of Rehabilitation/Special Education Course

This course covers content related to the European countries and selected developing countries. Countries are selected for study based on UCIR documentation and resources on programs in these countries, faculty and guest instructors who have consultation experience in these countries, and foreign graduate research assistants with the project from countries being studied.

A variety of instructional methods are used in the course, including panel and individual presentations, videotape interviews of foreign guests, slide presentations of overseas programs, and use of Tele Lec (a telephone conference) with experts in the field. The class period is divided into lecture, discussion and student investigation and reporting. The American students in the class have aspirations of some day serving as consultants, teachers, or technical assistants to overseas programs besides using the information to improve U.S. programs. The majority of students find that the course provides them with knowledge of unique rehabilitation programs and approaches in other countries that may have application to their own countries. Several of the students' final class products and issue papers have been in one of the following topical areas: cross-cultural barriers to international rehabilitation education and/or training; critical issues in vocational rehabilitation in developing countries; international information exchange; impact of cultural belief systems on attitudes and services for the disabled population; international rehabilitation research; international information exchange and retrieval; international consultation models; application of anthropological field research to rehabilitation concerns.

International Aspects - Overseas Course

A three-week summer overseas course involving 17 participants was

conducted in 1981 with 12 students enrolled for six credits (lecture and independent study). The overseas program focused on rehabilitation/special education in the Federal Republic of Germany. Students spent two weeks in lectures with faculty and guests at the University of Education, Heidelberg. They visited a variety of special education and rehabilitation facilities in and around the Heidelberg area. This was followed by a one-week lecture tour and orientation to rehabilitation facilities at the University of Cologne and centers in Hoensbroek, Netherlands; Mulhouse, France; and Basel, Switzerland. Students had the opportunity to meet with many outstanding leaders in the European rehabilitation arena and saw unique programs and technology in operation. Students' final products included a slide-tape presentation on the highlights of the overseas program, which has been shown at several conferences and loaned to agencies for in-service meetings, and a book of abstracts of overseas lectures and field reports. Audio tapes were also made of the major lectures and are on file for future class use.

A two-year follow-up study of the impact of this overseas experience on students is currently being conducted by way of mailed questionnaires and telephone interviews. The first questionnaire assessing program quality (assignments, cross-cultural experiences, program organization) was completed by students at the end of the three-week overseas program. The second and third questionnaires assessing the impact of the overseas learning experiences on the participants' studies or job were mailed out at six month intervals. The final assessment will be done by telephone interview to obtain information as to interest in further overseas studies, influence of the experience on understanding current global issues and events, and to promote the next overseas course. The frequency rate of return for the first questionnaire was 100%; for the second, 80%; and for the third, 70%. All three questionnaires showed that

for the majority of students, the overseas experience continued to have positive impact on their current areas of work or studies.

Issues in Curriculum Development

Significant learning can take place when students are placed in direct experimental confrontation with theoretical, practical, philosophical and research problems and issues. In order to make an impact on students' awareness of global issues, the subject matter must be relevant to the students' personal and professional world. This is often a difficult order to fill. The instructor will need ready access to current international and domestic publications, research reports and monographs, as well as U.S. and foreign experts who can serve as resource persons, content experts, and guest instructors.

A list of international organizations associated with areas of study can usually be obtained from any reference section in a university or public library. Many of these organizations have their own periodicals and journals that can be obtained upon request. Such organizations can also provide names of resource persons in the U.S. and abroad who can be of assistance in international courses. The success of any course that takes place overseas is based on the collaboration of professionals in host countries.

An office or center for overseas or international studies and programs exists on many university campuses. Such centers can provide assistance to academic departments in the development of brochures and program announcements for overseas courses, make arrangements for travel and student accommodations, and handle enrollment forms and collection of tuition and fees.

Some universities also have various international institutes, centers or departments with expert faculty and usually a resource library that can benefit faculty in the development of course materials and instruction.

One should not overlook foreign students who are usually delighted to share their expertise and knowledge about their countries. Since our project is involved in international information retrieval and dissemination, we capitalize on the knowledge and experience of our international students by providing opportunities for them to make presentations at in-service meetings, classes, seminars and colloquia.

Several university departments and/or universities with related programs may wish to join together to sponsor an overseas program, especially if alone they would not be able to attract enough students to conduct the course. Such collaborative efforts can reduce costs for students along with enriching their learning experience through mutual sharing.

Conclusion

Rehabilitation and special education are newly developed professional disciplines in many countries. By bringing students from these countries to the university for formal education in rehabilitation/special education and facilitating their educational experience, UCIR is able to provide valuable assistance in the development of personnel for these programs. The groundwork for the development of future network contacts is enhanced when these students return to their home countries. It should be noted that while the ultimate goal is improved services to the client-consumer, the focus of the formal education program is the development of leadership personnel in policy development, administration, research, teaching, and evaluation and practice. Handicapping conditions are universal and affect the productivity of all societies. Therefore, it is essential that academic programs include courses within international and global perspective in order to increase the breadth of knowledge and raise the level of awareness, social consciousness and aspiration of the students. Expanded understanding of global trends and issues that

impact on our professional and personal roles can enrich our lives. As Mackey (1979) stated so well, "Of all the instruments of society, the university remains the central institution that can make a lasting impact on development by building the necessary manpower infrastructure to develop the resources of the society involved and to improve its quality of life."

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